



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0937TX-2 for Abilene Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>The grant did articulate the reform vision and the advances made in the four core educational assurance areas of the district. Abilene ISD is working closely with the local P-16 Committee to integrate College and Career Readiness standards. The district uses Eduphoria to measure student growth. The data reports specify each student's academic progress in their class, broken down to specific Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Through a grant from the state, Abilene ISD began a teacher reward/award system to encourage and reward those teachers that develop innovative methods of instruction with the goal of reaching each student individually. The district also had success in increasing graduation rates and AP courses through TTIPS. The unique features of this program were not explained in the proposal. The district uses computer labs and an extended day to assist students in completing their homework.</i></p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The grant did not provide a description of the process used to select schools that will participate. The proposal indicated the number of educators, students that will participate in the grant.</p> <p>(b) A complete list of schools are identified in the Raw Data section of the proposal.</p> <p>(c) The grant does provide for the total number of educators and students, students from low income families and high needs students. Additional data and explanations on the breakdown of students would have been helpful. The proposal, in my professional judgment does not specify how it will support and provide for the high-need students and students from low income families.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>The programs that will be implemented are ones that have been proven to work in the district. This is not an implementation of "new" programs. RTT Administrative Team will conduct ongoing conversations with the leadership teams from each campus and from those conversations, the basis of the beneficial aspects of each program will be examined to determine how each program could benefit all other campuses within Abilene ISD. The process to expand the programs does not include specific criteria and it is a conversation and an "examination" which is not explained. The grant did not specify, describe or identify strategies on how the reform will support district-wide change and impact students targeted for improvement. The grant did not describe in detail how the reform proposal will be scaled up to other buildings except to indicate that the Superintendent who leads the A-Team will "discuss" how these programs can be implemented in a specific building. There is no systemic effort to present and discuss the key steps for implementing these programs in various buildings. The grant did not present strategies for matching the needs of the students and the outcomes of the programs.</i></p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The grant presented solid data on the key components and provided minimal explanation on the growth factor and why. The data</p>		

represents the growth and success the district experienced in the past few years. The TIPPS program reduced the achievement gap of low-income student population experienced an improvement of 18% passing the state's math TAKS test (moving low-socio economic students to a passing rate of 73%), and 20% passing the state's science TAKS test (moving low-socio economic students to a passing rate of 78%). The TTIPS program is not explained not are the key components that make this program successful in the school. There was no explanation on how goals and outcomes are set for the grade levels. Some of the data and tables were unclear. The graduation rate data was confusing. The grant did not include an explanation or rationale on incremental rates that were determined for each year. There was no data to support the impact of the TIPPS program with an increase in the graduation rate. The grant stated specifically that "the TTIPS reform/transformation effort at Abilene High School resulted directly in increases in both high school graduation rates and college entry/application rates. " There was no data to indicate that there is a direct correlation between the two components nor was there any data to support the increase in graduation and completion rates for the students.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	9
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>The grant shared data on the second year of the TTIPS program, which indicated that the low-income student population experienced an improvement of 18% passing the state's math TAKS test (moving low-socio economic students to a passing rate of 73%), and 20% passing the state's science TAKS test (moving low-socio economic students to a passing rate of 78%). The reform efforts promoted through the TTIPS program – such as providing financial awards for the highest performing teachers and ensuring that all classroom instruction is data driven, resulted in improved student academic performance. TTIPS reform/transformation effort at Abilene High School resulted directly in increases in both high school graduation rates and college entry/application rate. Year 2 of the TTIPS Transformation, progress was made again, with the Completion Rate increasing again – this time to 95% (542 graduates receiving diplomas on the Recommended Plan), and 326 students continuing on to postsecondary education at the end of the 2011-2012 school year from 92% completion rate (507 graduates receiving diplomas and 264 students continuing to postsecondary education – 2010-2011). There was also a significant increase in students completing Advanced Placement and Dual Credit course completion in high school (2010-11 310 AP courses completed and 76 Dual Credit courses completed to 2011-2012 368 AP credits and 93 Dual Credit Course were completed).</i></p> <p><i>The district implemented the "Reasoning Mind Program" which is a personalized program at the elementary level in order to increase mathematic skills to be successful in completing Algebra I. This program provides immediate feedback to the teacher and identifies area for improvement. Plato is a program used in ESP for credit recovery and credit acceleration and provides feedback to students, teachers, parents and academic performance. Front Runner allows parents and students to see recent grades and student's academic performance. These are solid approaches to allow parents the see the progress of their child(ren).</i></p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>The district on a monthly basis provides financial statements, supplemental financial information and amendments to the budget to the Board at each regular Board meeting. The annual budget process includes months of open meeting discussions and culminates with the publication of several related items including local newspaper and website. There was no specific mention of actual personnel salaries at the school level.</i></p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>Data was presented in the grant that the district has autonomy to implement programs that are personalized and meet the needs of their unique student and staff population. A couple of concrete examples were provided that supported the autonomy for the buildings. The grant identified these two programs - Reasoning of the Mind and the Texas Title I Priority School Program such as the Extended School Program which had a positive impact on students. Each school building has the autonomy to implement the program(s) matching their unique approach with student needs.</i></p>		

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	6
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district made efforts to involve the community at large and demonstrated this by inviting parents, students and teachers to attend two community forums. Parent and student comments were compiled and responded to with follow-up information. The district conducted a series of campus-based Community Forums to discuss campus needs, which led to the creation of a Campus Improvement Plan.</p> <p>The proposal described the district administration, which meets with the leaders of three teacher organizations, as well as the District-Wide Consultation Committee (DWCC). Abilene ISD teachers select representatives who meet with the Abilene ISD Superintendent and other administrators on a monthly basis, and more often, if the need arises. Abilene ISD teachers also select representatives to serve on a committee (the DWCC) that also meet with the Superintendent at least once each semester, to discuss and develop various plans or documents that directly impact teachers' instructional efforts on a daily basis. Community forums were held early and may not have impacted the grant. Parents and students input were included in grant. Teacher organizations were not clearly described on their support for the grant.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district will conduct a needs assessment at the earliest phase of the RTT grant that will serve as an important roadmap in all phases of the RTT grant and proposed projects. The needs assessment, as conducted by the external consultant, will be updated annually over the course of the grant period, with the results of each update disseminated broadly within the district and community. The grant indicated that this will be the starting point for implementing a personalized learning environment and at its core to improve student achievement.</p> <p>While the district conducted various needs assessments as part of other grants, there were no comments on the results of previous needs assessment that could be the driving force for this grant in developing a high quality plan. There were a few comments about the needs assessments from previous efforts but no statement was included on how these results would impact the high quality plan for implementing a personalized learning environment and addressing the student gaps through the needs assessment process.</p>		

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The grant describes the various digital and support programs and strategies that are currently being used or will be used in the future to prepare student for college and career learning. These include the Extended School Program(ESP), Closing the Gap Committee (community volunteers), needs assessment, Plato, Communities in Schools (CIS) and other efforts to support students. These programs and strategies focus on the individual student and provide for a personalized learning plan that highlights areas of strength and weakness for immediate attention. The grant did not discuss the parental involvement in this effort. The grant described the availability of student data for pinpointing the needs of students. The grant did not focus or describe the deep learning experiences of academic interest, master critical academic content and develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving, and high-quality strategies for high-need students to help ensure that they are on track toward meeting college- and career-ready standards. The grant did indicate, Minimally, that the students will receive training on how to use these tools but did not specify the strategies or process that will be used to implement the training.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	10
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The grant indicated that the teacher receives feedback on student progress four times a year (Benchmark test). The ESP has "spot checks" on student progress and what student must achieve in order to be prepared for college and career. The grant did not specific the training and professional development teachers will receive to support their efforts with the students. There</p>		

was not mention of ways to Improve teachers' and principals' practice and effectiveness by using feedback provided by the LEA's teacher and principal evaluation systems. C2 (b) and (c) had little or no information in regards to having access to, and know how to use, tools, data, and resources to accelerate student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready graduation requirements, participating school leaders and school leadership teams have training, policies, tools, data, and resources that enable them to structure an effective learning environment that meets individual student academic needs, and a high-quality plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals. The primary responsibility for the teaching and learning progress was left with the external evaluator.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	7
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: The grant did identify the administrative structure for the RTT grant program and allow for autonomous decisions related to the grant, at the local building level. Through the two programs identified in the grant ESP and RM, students can progress at their own rate. The district requires the students to take the benchmark assessments and it will develop additional assessments with grant funds. Item (e) was not explained in the proposal. The grant lacked specifics in describing school leadership and how students can progress in other areas besides the two programs. The grant in my opinion does not address or respond to the items with specific plans for the high quality plan that can close the achievement gap of students. In the grant it indicate that teachers will develop multiple assessment but the grant does not provide any details on how this will occur. For item (e), the grant also does not provide a systematic process on how these materials will be provided and the adaption to all students including the ones with disabilities and English Language Learners.		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	5
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: <i>The responses to these items were very broad and general and did not provide for any specific strategies or steps for ensuring the implementation to meet the identified needs. The grant did explain Eduphoria Aware, which is a system that provides data disaggregation with the state scores along with the benchmark scores to use this data to improve instruction and target students who are having academic problems. How this is accomplished is not explained. The grant commented for (a) that there will be "stakeholder forums on a monthly basis, conducting outreach to different organizations each month" but did not provide any details on how this will be implemented. Item (b) stated that "RTT Tech Support Department whose duty it will be to ensure students, parents and stakeholders have the technical support necessary" but again there were no comments on how this will be implemented and monitored to determine whether it was successful. Item (c) included the following comment that the district will "conduct a need assessment to determine what current systems can meet the requirements of the RTT program, and will develop an Request for Proposals to secure the necessary technology systems to allow parents and students to export their information in an open data format' which will allow a third party to identify the steps for implementation with minimal district support. Item (d) indicated that the school will use interoperable systems for student information data, budget data, and instructional improvement system data and the process for implementing this approach is not included in the grant proposal.</i>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	5
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: The grant mentioned that there are five steps to ensure sustainability but did not describe how the various programs, strategies, professional development and related activities will be sustained after the funding cycle. The grant stated that "ongoing aspect of AISD administration's conversations with these stakeholders will be the importance of ensuring adequate resources are available to sustain the transformation and requests for assistance in securing community support for those resources." There were minimal comments on how the district will identify, implement and assess and type of continuous improvement.		

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	1
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: <i>In other parts it was mentioned that the district will meet with stakeholders but the process was not described nor was the intent and what will be communicated.</i>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
(E)(3) Reviewer Comments: Good charts on performance measures but some explanations would have been very helpful. There was not response to (a), (b), and (c).		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	0
(E)(4) Reviewer Comments: No response.		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	5
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: <i>There is a solid rationale for the budget and explanation on personalizing education for the student population. The emphasis is on the ESP and a digital curriculum, which involves meeting the specific needs of students. The budget adds on Read 180 (mentioned once in the grant) and Individualized Assistance through Shepherds, which is only mentioned in the budget explanation. Did include sources from other agencies and did not discuss the rationale and sources for the funding.</i>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	2
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: <i>No direct response. It is only discussed in other parts of the grant under sustainability, which is very broad.</i>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: <i>Communities In Schools provides a comprehensive solution to the issues that place young people in jeopardy of dropping out. CIS will provide CIS caseworkers at one (1) elementary, three (3) middle schools, two (2) traditional high schools and one (1) alternative high school. The second external organization that will partner with Abilene ISD is the Day Nursery of Abilene (DNA) with their School Readiness Program. They will utilize the Frog Street assessment tool. Literacy and math lessons are offered daily. Lessons are short, theme-related and filled with hands-on applications and meaningful context. They follow a continuum that ensures all children build foundation skills before they are expected to master more complex and challenging skills and concepts. These programs support the efforts of the district but the grant did not address items 4 and 5.</i>		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The proposal met the personalized learning environments by discussing programs that will enhance individualized programs for the student and reduce achievement gaps across student groups. There was some efforts to describe strategies for increasing graduation rates to prepare students for college or careers.

Total	210	111
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0937TX-3 for Abilene Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district describes well the state's overall process in college and career-ready standards and assessments, but does not elaborate on its own proactive work in this area, as requested in this section. The only mention of its own work is in providing professional development to district teachers in the integration of the College and Career Readiness standards</p> <p>Abilene ISD appears to have a substantial data system already in place, with the capabilities to both measure student performance and inform educators of academic needs. Each campus has an Instructional Coordinator to actively produce and discuss student performance on state and local tests.</p> <p>The district's innovative use of the state's DATE system (teacher incentive and rewards) is specifically focused on matching effective teachers with challenging assignments, i.e., double blocks of English and math for struggling students. There was no mention of similar innovations for principals or for elementary teachers.</p> <p>The district cites its extensive state-funded TTIP work with Abilene HS as an example of turnaround strategy. Double blocks of core subjects, use of Extended School Program (ESP), and introduction of Read 180 are described as turnaround strategy components.</p> <p>Overall in Section A(1), this places the Abilene ISD in the medium range of scoring for this component.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As requested in this section, the district has described its process in determining that it will include all students. Abilene ISD intends to include all of its students and schools in its proposal, as they all are eligible. The district appropriately lists the district and school data in Table A(2). The total number of participating students and participating educators is also provided.</p> <p>Overall in Section A(2), this places the Abilene ISD in the high range of scoring for this component.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	3
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This proposal component asks for a high quality plan to be submitted, including Goals, Activities, Timelines, Deliverables, and Responsible Parties. There is no mention of such a plan in this component.</p>		

However, the district did provide some information as to its intent in scale-up. The district intends to scale-up/adapt existing reform initiatives in the district, rather than adopt new programs or strategies. Its logic model states that this will build upon already-begun efforts, with opportunities for learning from others and adaptation to other sites/school levels. The scale-up of the TTIP team approach into the bi-weekly A-Team is an example of that logic model.

Overall in Section A(3), this places the Abilene ISD in the low range of scoring for this component.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	2
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Student performance goals are set by grade level for each tested subject area and subgroup. There is no explanation as to how those numerical goals (3-point percentage gain per year for each group) were determined, as requested in Table A(4).</p> <p>The table on closing the achievement gap is confusing to the reader. Although the gains posited for each subgroup do show an increase (as in the earlier chart), the comparison group (e.g., White) is not listed as having any gains itself, although the preceding table did list annual incremental gains for the White subgroup at each grade level. It appears that the achievement gap is to be closed by the increased performance of the subgroups at the expense of any gains by the White group. Yet, the numbers do not match even within the table.</p> <p>The table A(4c) shows the proposed gains in graduation rates for each high school in the district and overall. There is no explanation as to how those numerical goals (ranging from +.5 to +3 points per year) were determined. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if these goals are ambitious and achievable.</p> <p>The same is true for the table on college enrollment rates. There is no explanation as to how the numerical goals (3 points annually) were determined, and therefore, how they might be seen as ambitious and achievable.</p> <p>Overall in Section A(4), this places the Abilene ISD in the low range of scoring for this component.</p>		

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	11
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district cites several examples of improving achievement and closing the achievement gap at Abilene HS through the implementation of its state-funded TTIP grant. Data are provided as evidence of these successes, and these provide strong evidence of demonstrating a clear record of prior success.</p> <p>The district cites its use of Reasoning Mind (computer program in preparing for Algebra) in its elementary and secondary schools as an example of reform in its low-performing schools. Although the program holds a strong research base and holds promise, no data were cited as evidence of its success in Abilene.</p> <p>The district has data available for students, educators and parents from the use of its two computer-based programs (Reasoning Mind and Plato). It also provides data for information and improvement to these same groups through the data system Front Runner, which can increase parent/student participation through an ongoing dialogue format.</p> <p>In the B(1) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the middle range.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	1
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district cites several venues in which its expenditures are made available to the public, such as open budget meetings, website information and notices. There was no information about how budget information is distributed directly to families and community. There was also no mention of the availability of salary information as required in the application.</p> <p>In the B(2) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The district appropriately summarizes its conditions for autonomy by citing its work with Reasoning Mind program and TTIP grant for Abilene HS. Both examples provide specific instances of application of personalized environments, going above and beyond state mandates, and demonstrating its conditions for successful autonomy.

In the B(3) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the high range.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)

10

6

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The district provided forums in mid-September for parents to learn about and make comment on the district's proposal. The proposal also built on previous student and parent surveys about individual campuses, which informed the current proposal.

The district sent an email to all district teachers in late September about the proposal, and received only 18 negative responses. The district also cites teacher satisfaction with some of the already-existing components of the proposal, such as Plato, but did not provide evidence that at least 70% of the teachers are in formal support of the proposal. There was no evidence cited that teachers and other stakeholders were engaged in the actual development of the proposal. Indeed, the timelines of mid- to late-September make early involvement unlikely.

The district says that it provided letters of support from several stakeholder organizations, but did not provide them. The district does describe its collaborative relationship with several of them.

In the B(4) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the middle range.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)

5

3

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The district describes how several of the already-existing components of the proposal are regularly assessed and monitored for strengths and needs. The district proposes to hire an external entity to provide overall monitoring of needs and gaps. The proposal did not cite examples of specific needs and gaps from the current programs -- what they will need for scale-up, for example.

In the B(5) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the middle range.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The application calls for a high-quality plan in this section to be described about improving teaching and learning. The plan should include goals, activities, deliverables, timelines, and responsible parties. No such plan is described in the applicant's proposal, although the proposal does identify a number of important pieces that would be central in such a plan. For example, the description of the Extended School Program carries with it several aspects of personalized learning environments that could be successfully scaled-up from existing sites. However, no explanation is offered as to when and how the district would take advantage of such a resource in a comprehensive plan.</p> <p>The proposal appears to leave more detailed planning in the area of Teaching and Learning to the external consultant, who is to be hired with RTTT-District funds. Some of the seeds of such planning are certainly present in the proposal -- but they are not elaborated to the extent of a plan that integrates all the areas in C(1). As this section should be responsive to the key areas of teaching and learning, it is not sufficient to leave those decisions to an external service provider.</p> <p>In the C(1) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the middle range.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	10
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Again, the application calls for a high-quality plan which weaves together the components of Teaching and Leading in C(2). Although there is no such elaborated plan, the proposal does identify a number of components which would be key in the</p>		

development of such a plan, if they were given further detail and attention. For example, both Reasoning Mind and Extended Student Plan form the basis of innovative areas in instructional strategies, use of time, differentiated pacing, etc. They also provide relevant bases for the development of tailored professional development for teachers and principals as they grow in their own strengths as instructional leaders.

The district's current work in assessment and data inquiry is also a good preface for the development of a high-quality plan in this area. The district cites this development as a function of the to-be-hired external consultant to the project, instead of its own creation, which is troublesome. The district also aligns its work in teacher incentives and retention as part of a larger initiative with the state.

In the C(2) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the middle range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	3
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This section of the application calls for a high-quality plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure. Such a plan is to include goals, activities, timelines, deliverables, and responsible parties. No such plan is provided in the district's proposal, although the proposal does supply some key activities that it will undertake in this area.</p> <p>For example, the central office will undergo some restructuring, in order to establish a department focusing on the grant. The proposal does not indicate at what level of administration this office will function, or how it will integrate its work with other departments. In other parts of this section, there are assurances that project implementation will be supported by policies and infrastructure, but no examples are given.</p> <p>In item (c) of this section, only students involved in specific programs appear to be able earn credit based on demonstrated mastery, not all students.</p> <p>In the D(1) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	2
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Again, the response to this section should be part of a high-quality plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure. No elements of such a plan are provided, although some key activities are listed.</p> <p>For example, the district will conduct monthly stakeholder forums to discuss/provide needed access to learning resources, and regular resource inventories will be conducted.</p> <p>The RTT initiative in Abilene will include an RTT Tech Support system, making assistance available districtwide.</p> <p>The district described its access to and use of Eduphoria, a TEA student performance data system, but did not provide information about interoperable data systems.</p> <p>In the D(2) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	3
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Overall, the response to the E. Continuous Improvement section is intended to be built upon the district's high-quality plan elaborated in section D. Abilene ISD is therefore hampered in section E because it did not put forward a high-quality plan in section D. The district's responses to continuous improvement are necessarily general in nature, rather than extensive, although some good ideas are identified. For example, in E(1), the district intends to hold regular stakeholder forums, to</p>		

provide substantive time for site teams to work together, and to provide professional development in problem-solving as part of a culture of continuous improvement. These could be valuable activities as opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements, but they are not directly tied to project goals, nor are they part of a coherent, comprehensive plan.

In the E(1) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	1
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district indicates minimally that it will hold forums with internal and external stakeholders, but does not discuss the regularity or desired results of such forums, nor does it suggest any other strategies for ongoing communication and engagement.

In the E(2) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	1
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

For the first and second required performance measures for all students, the table lists student grade levels and subject areas instead of ESEA student subgroups (race/ethnicity, ELL, Special Education, low-SES, etc) The way the table is constructed now masks any gaps in high quality educators assigned to ESEA subgroups. The district has added a third performance measure for all students -- attendance -- but provides no subgroup information at all.

The performance measures selected for Pre-K through grades 3 only addresses readiness level skills in the preschool and again provides no subgroup information.

The required performance measure for students in grades 4-8 does include ESEA student subgroups, but does not identify what the district is using as its on-track indicators, although it may be inferred it is some cut score in state-tested reading and math. For the district-selected performance measures, the district selected attendance as an academic indicator and discipline as its social-emotional leading indicator. It is difficult to agree that attendance is an ambitious academic indicator. No subgroup information was provided.

For the grades 9-12 tables of performance measures, the table on FAFSA is appropriately completed. The on-track indicator table is also appropriate although the indicator is not clearly identified. Again, it appear sto be some determined cut score.

The career readiness indicators are the same as those selected for college and career, apparently using a determined cut score of some kind. For the district-selected performance measures, the district selected attendance as an academic indicator and discipline as its social-emotional leading indicator. It is difficult to agree that attendance is an ambitious academic indicator. No subgroup information was provided.

In the E(3) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	0
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

No information was provided for the E(4) section of the application.

In the E(4) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	5

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The district provides an appropriate budget which lays out, for the most part, the major initiatives in its proposal. The narrative delineates which costs are anticipated to be ongoing and which are for one-time layout. About \$600,000 is allocated to military and refugee shepherds, who are not cited anywhere else in the district proposal. The budget does appear to be reasonable and sufficient for the proposal. About \$2.6 million will come from other sources.

A list of project summary areas is included, but no individual budget project summaries were available.

In the F(1) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the middle range.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)

10

0

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district's proposal is not responsive in this section. Rather than put forward a high-quality plan for sustainability, the language merely repeats the same information that was in section E.

In the F(2) section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the low range.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	4

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The district clearly identifies the two external partners with whom it wishes to collaborate, and describes fully the roles and contributions of the two partners. It also identifies the student populations which would be served by this collaboration.

The descriptions of the two external organizations contain ample information on the connections between academic and social/emotional factors. Little information is provided on how the organizations/partnership will track the students, or scale up later. There is no information on the building capacity of staff through the competitive priority partners.

The district only proposes two population-level desired results. One is educational (for pre-school) and the other social/behavioral (K-12). The district's response does elaborate somewhat on these desired results through its tables of related performance measures. However, the performance measure for K-12 appears to include all the district's students, instead of the proposed specific population.

In the Competitive Preference Priority section of the application, Abilene ISD scores in the middle range.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The district has certainly put forward a good-faith proposal for RTTT-District funds. However, it has not put together a high-quality plan in any of the required areas to integrate the proposed services, provide support, prepare for continuous improvement, and provide sustainability for the budget. The proposal does contain a number of good ideas, and strong existing practices (as noted in earlier reviewer comments), but unfortunately, the proposal does not aggregate and integrate those strong building blocks into a coherent and comprehensive plan.

The required performance measures, in several instances, do not include ESEA sub-populations in the tables. Attendance is identified as an academic measure, which is difficult to consider ambitious academically.

Abilene ISD does not meet the Absolute Priority requirements of the selection criteria of this application.

Total	210	89
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0937TX-4 for Abilene Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant clearly has made progress with Abilene High School, particularly though its district improvement goals related to the ongoing statewide College and Career Readiness project and a school improvement grant. Through the Texas Title I School Improvement grant for instance, the high school made steady gains in its graduation rates and increased the numbers of those continuing on to postsecondary education over the period of two years.</p> <p>There is also inclusion of other core assurance areas, namely the frequent use of data to inform instruction, strategic placement of teachers and efforts to turn around low achieving schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of the Eduphoria student data system appears to be regularly utilized, ones which produce student performance information towards the development of differentiated instructional plans. • The District Awards for Teaching Excellence program incentivizes and encourages motivated educators to teach the more challenging classes. • The existing Extended School Program appears to be an effective way of providing more intensive academic practice as well as opportunity for students to accelerate their learning at their own pace beyond the typical school hours. <p>While the intention with the grant is to continue the improvement efforts at Abilene High School, and extend them to the other schools in the district, it is unclear if the previous initiatives only targeted this high school or were less effective at the younger grade levels. More detail regarding the differentiation in programs or approaches that might be necessary for success at the other schools would have been helpful. There is also not a clearly identifiable vision or cohesive approach beyond the stated interest in replicating self-standing programs.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant includes the required information related to the list of participating schools and the specific demographic information related to all participating students.</p> <p>There is no description of the rationale behind including all of the Abilene district schools, which is especially important given the types of programming the district intends to replicate.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	3
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The differentiation in approach between 'study or try everything' and the investment in programs that have already proven successful is a positive one. Reference to the importance of gaining 'buy in' from teachers and also credibility related to adopting programs that have been used locally is significant.</p> <p>The function of the RTT Administrative Team in having ongoing conversations with each school leadership team would likely lead to a good level of differentiation and response to different school campus needs. It is unclear how the proposed RTT Administrative Team, however, would be able to sustain ongoing conversations with all participating schools, as there are 31 schools in the district overall. There is also nominal information related to naming the specific suite of programs available at each different grade level, especially for the elementary and middle school grades.</p> <p>Ultimately, adequate detail and a description of process, beyond the intention to hold regular A-Team like conversations between high level administrators, are missing.</p>		

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	3
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not provide sufficient information related to intended performance growth on summative assessments and for decreasing achievement gaps. Adequate description of the various reading and STARR assessments is absent and it does not appear that there is a clear rationale behind the undifferentiated growth rate of 3% improvement every year across all categories. It is also unclear what the percentage values indicate for the second group in every pair related to the achievement gap goals.</p> <p>The anticipated goals laid out for increasing graduation rates and college enrollment are also left undefined and unexplained. No rationale is evident for the targeted improvement rates and it does not appear that there is any corollary, differentiated approach for meeting the needs of English Language Learners.</p>		

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	7
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant names the arrival of the new superintendent, in particular his focus on data-driven student learning, along with the approval of the state School Improvement Grant, as the key factors driving improvement at Abilene High School. The described improvements are laudable, including increased rates of graduation, AP credits granted and increased numbers applying and gaining entrance into post-secondary education. The integration of the Extended School Program, one that focused on both credit recovery as well as a full-school option for other students, appears to have positively impacted the Abilene High School graduation rates.</p> <p>Related to support of lowest-achieving schools, the introduction of the Reasoning Mind Program for elementary math instruction relates closely to the approach of providing differentiated support to individual students. There is not much consideration or detail regarding how the inclusion of this computer-based program was integrated into teacher practice, however. The introduction of a few computer-based programs, Reasoning Mind and Plato, is not an ambitious and significant reform by itself without the corollary professional development and support of teachers to effectively integrate their use in their daily practice for all students.</p> <p>It is promising to see the use of the Front Runner program now in place in the district towards providing up-to-date grades and other academic information for both students and parents.</p> <p>As a whole, the district demonstrates a partial track record of success, namely through the limited discussion of a few key programs that are in place at a limited number of schools.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district demonstrates a limited amount of transparency regarding its processes, practices and investments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant describes monthly Board meetings where financial information is presented as well as an annual budget process that involves a series of open discussion meetings. There is no discussion of how actual personnel salaries are communicated or made public, however, nor opportunities for the general public to get information related to the processes, instructional and institutional practices and other investments of the district. 		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	2
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not provide adequate description of the state context related to grant implementation. Beyond the description of the use of the Reasoning Mind Program and the statewide School Improvement grant, there is very little explication about the conditions for innovation and personalization on a larger scale.</p>		

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	2
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The Community Forums that the district held in the early phase of this grant application process seemed to be an important element of communicating the general frame of the district improvement initiative. It does not appear as if this feedback was used to modify the grant proposal, however, and the evidence of parent and student comments that is referenced is not included in the application.</p> <p>It does appear that efforts were made to directly engage teachers related to the grant proposal, but there is not clear evidence that 70% of teachers supported it, beyond anecdotal descriptions of teachers eventually approving the integration of the Reasoning Mind Program and reference to approval from non-described teacher organizations.</p> <p>While letters of support are referenced by the applicant, none were included as part of the application.</p> <p>As a whole, the district provides insufficient evidence to demonstrate a deep level of stakeholder engagement and support.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district clearly identifies that it will hire an external consultant to conduct a district-wide Personalized Learning Environment Needs Assessment. Specifically mentioning the model laid out by the International Center for Leadership in Education, it is evident that ample attention and resources will go towards identifying the critical needs and gaps, related to personalization, in the district. Additional needs and gaps analysis, however, would have been helpful to mention related to the other core assurance areas.</p>		

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	4
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not present a convincing, high-quality approach to learning that would likely lead to engagement and empowerment of the district's students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most frequently referenced initiative, the Extended School Program, described as an example of engagement and empowerment of all learners, is an untenable generalization. As a program, according to the applicant, that only was instituted at the high school level, it was not instituted or proven at the middle school and elementary school levels. The applicant presents the Extended School Program, through the Plato online curriculum program, as the primary vehicle towards personalizing the educational experience for its students. As a program that primarily has been utilized for credit recovery and only in for some limited instances as a full replacement of academic coursework, it is unclear how it would be able to engage students towards goal setting, identifying goals related to college and career ready standards, or to be involved in particular deep learning in areas of high interest. Much more information related to the curriculum platform in Plato, and a detailed description of how teachers would navigate and integrate this platform in their class and individualized instruction, would be needed to reflect a high quality plan. The notion that diversity among various community volunteers represents meaningful access and exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives, particularly as related to individual student learning, is borderline offensive. There is no clear mechanism presented that explains how movement towards individualized learning goals for students would be measured and communicated to students or parents. Moreover, the relationship between the Plato curricular materials and the district benchmarks exams is unclear. Nominal attention is paid towards students with areas of high need beyond mentioning those strategies will developed at some generalized later point in time. The applicant does not mention specific mechanisms or supports that would be instituted to provide them with training and support relative to tracking their own learning progress. 		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	3
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The applicant does not demonstrate a clear, high quality approach towards helping educators improve their instruction and increase their capacity to support personalized instruction through differentiated teaching strategies and approaches.

- There is a significant lack of detail regarding strategies towards engaging all district teachers in professional development and learning, whether individually or in learning communities. The result of this omission gives little confidence related to the ability of the district's teachers to implement specific personalization strategies and required shifts in their core curriculum or to adequately measure students' individual progress towards their goals.
- The district appears willing to put the majority of the decision-making related to professional development to the externally hired consultant instead of in the hands of educators themselves. Without teachers empowered to make those decisions, it is unlikely that these plans will be followed meaningfully or with necessary buy-in.
- There is nominal discussion of how teacher and principal evaluation will be used towards increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective educators.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	2
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not present a convincing, high-quality plan related to LEA practices, policies and rules to support the personalization of student learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation of another administrative office as a support mechanism misses the critical need to organize around supports that educators and school leaders would need to make these significant adjustments to practice. • The creation of a technology support department has an unclear function, whether to simply troubleshoot technology related questions or to facilitate the professional learning for teachers to understand how to meaningfully integrate the technology platforms in their instruction. From the applicant descriptions of the department, it appears to be the former. • There is no convincing regulatory or programmatic evidence that all district schools would be provided with the necessary flexibility to institute the grant proposal. • The role of the external consultant related to the development of multiple assessments for students seems untenable. It is not clear that teachers will either fully understand or be able to develop this broad range of materials, especially without planned structures and reserved time to do so in a meaningful way. • The aspirational statement that all materials will be developed in a way that is 'fully adaptable and fully accessible to all students,' particularly without evidence of a plan or strategy to do so, is unconvincing. 		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	1
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not have a high quality plan that indicates that the LEA and school infrastructure would meaningfully and strategically support personalized student learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan to conduct stakeholder forums on a monthly basis is not a meaningful mechanism for ensuring that all students, parents, teachers and stakeholders can deeply and meaningfully support the implementation of the proposed activities. • The proposed creation of the RTT Tech Support Department will likely prove ineffective in providing technical guidance and professional development, as opposed to the narrower function of just technical support. • There is little detail related to the additional data that would be created towards the ends of tracking and supporting personalized learning for all students, and how this data would be interoperable with the existing district data systems. 		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	0
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

The applicant does not include evidence of a thoughtfully designed continuous improvement process.

- The description of intending to 'invite faculty and community input in the planning stage' and seeking 'continued support' is not a clear strategy.
- The reference to creating 'contingency plans' related to possible changes in staffing and resources is not a clear strategy.
- The commitment to 'ensure that new staff is committed to adopting the reform measures' is not a clear strategy.
- The references to providing 'dedicated time and space' to educators and 'providing professional development' to educators are not clear strategies.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)

5

0

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

There is no effort towards identifying or describing specific strategies related to ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)

5

0

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

With the absence of a clear rationale for selecting the charted performance measures as well the absence of descriptions of how the district will review and improve the measures over time, the applicant does not succeed in communicating effective or meaningful performance measures.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)

5

0

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

There is not a quality, developed plan related to evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed grant activities.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	0
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The included budget information does not adequately identify all the funds that would support the project as a whole nor detail the specific expenses related to any personnel beyond unexplained costs related to expanding particular programs.</p> <p>The expenses budgeted are not reasonable to support the actualization of the district's proposal, particularly there are no clear budget items that relate to the professional development, training and ongoing support for educators to create and implement the revised curriculum sequences.</p> <p>There does not appear to be a clear, driving rationale behind the use of funds, nor indication what funds are one-time investments as opposed to ongoing operational costs.</p> <p>The applicant does not address issues of long-term sustainability.</p> <p>As a whole, the budget is not reasonable, sustainable or adequately justified.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	0
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not describe any ideas or plans related to supporting the long-term sustainability of the project's goals.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	4
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant identifies two promising organizations that would likely lead to improved results, resource alignment and integrated services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Communities in Schools organization, one which focuses on safety in the learning place, connections with adults and an emphasis on giving back to peers and communities among others, seems well equipped to provide targeted assistance to the included schools in the partnership. The inclusion of case workers as well as attendance officers for the secondary level, would lead to increased capacity at the school level to address issues related to attendance and for those students who need additional supports. The Day Nursery of Abilene also appears to be an organization that would allow for a greatly increased capacity to offer pre-kindergarten seats district wide. Moreover, the focus on integration of multiple disciplines and themes, social-emotional development, differentiated instruction and bilingual materials, would likely better prepare students entering kindergarten. <p>There is a scarce amount of population-desired results that are detailed, however, and there is little rationale provided that describe the range of the intended growth in participating students.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide information related to building the capacity of staff in participating schools, nor information related to strategies to scale these efforts more broadly.</p> <p>Overall, the applicant demonstrates a moderate likelihood that it would effectively make use of strategic resource alignment and providing integrated services for its students.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not coherently and comprehensively address how it would build upon the core assurance areas of the grant towards the personalization of learning experiences for its students. While it is laudable that success has been achieved and documented at Abilene High School through the recent School Improvement Grant efforts, the plans to translate those programs to the other schools in the district are largely undeveloped.</p> <p>The focus on learning environments and personalization appears confined to the implementation of Extended School Program structure, which itself hinges on the largely undescribed Plato digital curriculum. As the applicant presents, the ESP was most utilized as a credit recovery program, targeted in particular to students who were otherwise unsuccessful in the traditional classes, were at risk of dropping out or were otherwise not engaged in school. While laudable in that it provided avenues towards graduation for those students, it is not clear how the applicant intends to broaden the use and perception of ESP as a vehicle for personalization or education for all students, from grades K-12. The idea that a digital curriculum easily translates into personalization is not convincing as a sole theory of action. Little effort, for instance, was made to build structures around training, supporting and organizing educators themselves around the ideas of personalization and college and career readiness; instead, the idea of 'personalization' is presented as being adequately 'covered' through the existence of the computer software.</p> <p>The applicant does not directly address how it plans to decrease achievement gaps in any particular strategic manner. With the data as presented, there is little rationale provided related to how student growth will occur and what strategies would result in those, or any, patterns of growth.</p> <p>Ultimately, while the applicant presents a important interest in spreading its successful programming at Abilene High School, the district does not present a plan nor a budget that represents coherence. It does not adequately address the factors that make a district-wide initiative distinct from a school-specific one. It does not meet the absolute priority related to creating personalized learning environments for its students.</p>		

Total	210	50
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